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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 300th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 27 April 2007, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report by the Chairman on developments since the previous meeting

2. **The Chairman** said that, on 22 and 23 March, the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace had been held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome.

3. From 24 to 27 March, the Secretary-General had visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where he had met with the Palestinian Authority President, Palestinian representatives, Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, the United States Secretary of State, the Israeli Prime Minister and other high-level Israeli officials. He had also seen first-hand the checkpoints, settlements and the wall in the West Bank, all of which he had found deeply troubling. The Secretary-General had been struck by the Palestinian people's long-standing yearning for their own State and by the many frustrations they faced every day, and had stressed the need to give the new Palestinian national unity government political space to focus on the tasks ahead.

4. On 29 March, at the 19th Arab Summit, held in Riyadh, Arab leaders had re-endorsed the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. The Riyadh Declaration had affirmed the option of a just and comprehensive peace as the strategic option for the Arab nation.

5. On 15 April, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas had met in Jerusalem, where they had discussed travel and trade restrictions, and the broad outline for a Palestinian State. Their pledge to meet twice a month was most welcome.

6. On 26 April, the Bureau had met the new Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, congratulating him on his recent appointment and informing him about the Committee's work. The Under-Secretary-General had stressed that both he and the Secretary-General considered the situation in the Middle East to be one of the priorities of the United Nations. He had assured the Bureau that he would pay particular attention to the activities of the Committee.

Developments in the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

7. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) said that he had been part of the Palestinian delegation that had met the Secretary-General on his recent visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. During that visit, the Secretary-General had seen first-hand the devastation caused by the wall, the dangers of illegal settlements and the difficult situation facing the Palestinian people; spoken with representatives of Palestinian prisoners; met with President Abbas; and held a press conference, among other activities. The Security Council meeting earlier that week had been very constructive, providing an opportunity for a serious discussion on the latest developments. In addition, the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine had sent letters to the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly on developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the upsurge in aggression against Palestinian citizens. Just recently, nine Palestinians, including children, had been killed in the space of 24 hours.

8. Multiple efforts were being made by several parties — in particular, the Arab countries, the new Palestinian national unity Government and the Quartet — to revive the peace process towards a resumption of direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis and, ultimately, a just and peaceful resolution of the conflict. Such efforts had rekindled hopes for a breakthrough that would stem the deterioration of the situation and create an environment conducive to dialogue and substantial peace negotiations.

9. Israel, however, continued to carry out illegal policies and practices aimed at sustaining its nearly 40-year-old occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. While everyone else talked of peace, Israel continued its colonization campaign, its military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population and its collective punishment of the Palestinian people. Land grabs and expansionism also continued, as well as attempts to de facto annex large areas of Palestinian land, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem. Israel's aim was clearly to entrench and fortify its illegal settlements and illegal measures of de facto annexation. The continued colonization of Palestinian land was shredding the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory and gravely threatened the prospects of achieving a two-

State solution in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the road map. The more than 500 checkpoints and roadblocks erected by the occupying Power in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had bisected the territory and severely restricted freedom of movement into, out of and throughout the territory. Even humanitarian and medical personnel, including those of the United Nations, were subject to such restrictions and harassment. The security pretext did not justify the checkpoints, which were intended to control the movement of persons and goods and were part of the occupying Power's attempts to dehumanize, humiliate, harass and subjugate the Palestinian people under its occupation.

10. Even though the Palestinian reality was harsh, the Palestinian leadership, with the wide support of the Palestinian people, continued to pursue peace. A national unity government had been formed, giving President Abbas the mandate to pursue a final peace settlement, and the agreement among Palestinian factions on a ceasefire and calm remained in force.

11. However, Israel had yet to reciprocate in any meaningful way and instead continued to pursue its violent and illegal policies and distort the reality on the ground. Israel had not accepted the Palestinian offer to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank. The occupying Power violated the human rights of the Palestinian people on a daily basis and then perpetuated the perception that the Israeli people must live in fear of those whom they were occupying and subjugating. That distortion was promoted by people pursuing a narrow extremist agenda, who continued to shore up support for Israel's criminal actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the wall, the settlements, the checkpoints, the siege of Jerusalem and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, although the majority of Israelis sought peace. They continued to oppose any steps that might revive the peace process and supported the policies aimed at making Gaza a massive prison, compounding the suffering of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza and fuelling violence and extremism. That situation was unjustifiable, unethical, illogical and dangerous and would sabotage any progress that was made.

12. There was, however, a window of opportunity, which Palestinians and Arabs alike were striving to seize. The Palestinian unity government affirmed respect for all previous agreements and had mandated President Abbas to negotiate a just and final peace settlement with Israel. On the Arab side, meanwhile, the recent Arab Summit in Riyadh had reaffirmed the Arab Peace Initiative. Israel was being offered full peace and a normalization of relations in exchange for full withdrawal from the territories it had occupied in 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along with a just and agreed upon solution for Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. A follow-up Arab Ministerial Committee meeting the previous week had agreed on a number of practical steps to invigorate the Arab Peace Initiative, including meeting with the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the Quartet and calling for an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations and the Quartet, which all parties to the conflict should attend.

13. That historic opportunity must not be lost like so many before it. It was important to build on the momentum generated and proceed with peace efforts seriously, with the fortitude to overcome the obstacles that would inevitably arise. President Abbas was prepared to negotiate final status issues unconditionally. If there was a partner for peace on the Israeli side who was also willing to negotiate unconditionally, the Palestinian side was ready. Those who imposed conditions did not want peace, for such conditions were just empty excuses to delay and avoid peacemaking. In order to be fair and successful, negotiations should be conducted in the framework of an international conference, as negotiations in the presence of common and supportive friends would promote the peace process by encouraging dialogue, holding both parties to their obligations and compelling them not to leave the negotiations until an agreement was signed. All successful negotiations in contemporary history, including those between the Arabs and Israelis, had been conducted with the help of a third party. The Arab Ministerial Committee's proposal should be seriously considered and widely supported.

14. **Mr. Whitley** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)) welcomed the positive developments that had taken place since the previous meeting, in particular the establishment of the national unity government, the vigorous Arab activity in support of

the Arab Peace Initiative, the increased pace of the Quartet's efforts and the Secretary-General's personal attention to the issue in recent months. Such steps were necessary to the overall humanitarian environment. UNRWA hoped for an early return to law and order in Gaza. For now, lawlessness continued to plague the region, impacting negatively on the Agency's work, endangering those not involved in the clashes and only adding to the long-standing dangers to civilians of Israeli military actions in the occupied territories.

15. There had been a slight improvement in the long-standing access and movement problems. Karni crossing was now operating more regularly and for longer hours, but the number of trucks allowed through was still well below that agreed by Israel in the November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, affecting the Agency's ability to distribute food. The lack of improvement in the movement of Palestinian and international non-diplomatic staff through Erez checkpoint, meanwhile, was a cause for concern.

16. Owing to poorer than anticipated donor response, it had been necessary to reduce the Agency's original budget for 2007 ($487 million). Actual expenditure for 2007 was now expected to be around $380 million. If additional donor funds were received in the second half of the year, the current squeeze on running costs and the halt imposed on expansion plans in 2006 would be eased accordingly. Thus far, UNRWA had received pledges of $367 million. He acknowledged those donors that had significantly increased their contributions — in particular, Canada, Finland, Ireland, Italy and Norway.

17. As for the emergency appeal, UNRWA had received 83 per cent of the amount requested in 2006, but would be lucky if it received 50 per cent of the amount requested for 2007 ($246 million). That amount included funds that had been received too late in 2006 to be spent that year and had therefore been carried over to 2007. Gaza, where needs were greatest, would bear the brunt of reductions. The Agency's cash assistance programme was suffering major cutbacks, while its temporary job creation programme was running at lower levels than the previous year. Its food aid programme would also suffer: on the basis of the current income forecast, food was expected to run out in August in the West Bank and in September in Gaza. At a time when needs were greater, the donor response had not been as good as hoped. He hoped to see a more serious effort in the second half of the year.

Report by the Chairman on the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, 22 and 23 March 2007, headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome

18. **The Chairman**, introducing his report, said that the Meeting had been successful and well attended by representatives of 76 Governments, the Holy See, Palestine and the Sovereign Order of Malta, as well as representatives of five intergovernmental organizations, five United Nations agencies and bodies, 29 civil society organizations, and eight media organizations. At the opening meeting, statements had been made by the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, on behalf of the Secretary-General, and the Head of the Social Affairs Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, on behalf of Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, as well as himself, on behalf of the Committee. The plenary meetings had included panel discussions, with the participation of members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Knesset as well as parliamentarians from South Africa, the Russian Federation and the European Parliament, on the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. The role of parliaments in promoting dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians and the restoration of momentum to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process had been discussed.

19. In the final document adopted at the closure of the event, the participants had welcomed the formation of the Palestinian national unity government which should allow the international community to restore the much needed economic and humanitarian assistance and help to move the political process forward. The document had also stated that the international community had an obligation to support the new Government without preconditions and lift the aid restrictions imposed on it.

20. In addition, the participants had stressed the lack of progress in establishing peace in the Middle East and in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which had increased mutual mistrust and fuelled extremism at the local, regional and international levels. Furthermore, the voice of religious leaders in efforts to overcome differences and misunderstandings between Western and Islamic societies was essential for the promotion of a dialogue among civilizations. A

solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would greatly contribute to fostering such a dialogue.

21. The participants had also discussed in detail the important role played by national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations in promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. They had expressed the hope that the parties would overcome the remaining differences in their quest for a final settlement based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations bodies, the Madrid terms of reference adopted at the Peace Conference on the Middle East in 1991, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. The participants had also supported calls for convening an international peace conference on the Middle East.

22. On 24 March, the Committee delegation had held consultations with NGO representatives from Europe, North America and the Middle East, including Palestinians and Israelis, concerning the Committee's programme of cooperation with civil society. The purpose of the one-day consultations had been to continue the dialogue with NGOs with which the Committee had long-standing ties and to establish new relations, in particular with a few Italian organizations involved in the question of Palestine. The representatives had informed the Committee delegation about their initiatives, campaigns and projects, in particular in preparation for the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. They had also made several suggestions concerning the Committee's forthcoming Civil Society Conference, which they considered should be held at the end of June in Brussels.

23. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to take note of his report.

24. *It was so decided.*

United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine, 9 and 10 May 2007, and the United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, 11 May 2007, Pretoria

15. **The Chairman** drew attention to Working Paper No. 3, which set out the provisional programme of the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine and the United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace. The meetings were aimed at encouraging broad international action, including by African States, to support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and achieve a solution to the conflict based on a shared vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Participants would discuss the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, international efforts to achieve sustainable Israeli-Palestinian peace and African solidarity with the Palestinian people's aspirations for independence and statehood. Invitations to the events had been extended to internationally renowned experts, including Israeli and Palestinian experts, Member States and Observers, parliamentarians, representatives of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, representatives of civil society and the media.

26. He took it that the Committee wished to approve the provisional programme for the event contained in Working Paper No. 3.

27. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.